

LINCOLN, NE--Congressman Jeff Fortenberry commented on President Obama's decision to permit continued U.S. military assistance to four nations that use child soldiers in violation of U.S. foreign assistance law. Fortenberry is the author of this law, the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2007, which was enacted in 2008 as part of the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act.

“Four out of six countries found by the U.S. Department of State to use child soldiers will effectively go unsanctioned for their pernicious human rights abuses,” said Fortenberry. “I recognize this was not a cavalier judgment, but it is important the Administration explain its decision. Our continued military assistance to countries that violate our foreign assistance laws presents an affront to our principles. It is true that we must work to help prevent spiraling instability and promote a semblance of just order in the midst of what are often highly volatile security situations. Yet we are obligated by law to combat this most serious human rights violation, especially prevalent in the world's ungoverned spaces, where children can easily fall victim to coercion and abhorrent abuses. We must have an urgent dialogue about ending this human rights abuse, and that begins with the issue of military assistance to these countries.”

The 2010 State Department Trafficking-in Persons Report is the first to contain the Fortenberry child soldiers reporting requirement. The 2010 Trafficking-in Persons Report identified the following major international violators of the child soldiers prohibition: Burma, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen.

Fortenberry's Child Soldiers measure, as signed into law on December 23, 2008, prohibits funds from being obligated to the government of a country identified by the Department of State as having governmental armed forces or government supported armed groups, including paramilitaries, militias, or civil defense forces, that recruit or use child soldiers, unless a presidential national security interest waiver is issued. President Obama today issued waivers for the governments of Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Yemen.

Fortenberry is a member of the House Foreign Affairs and Oversight and Government Reform Committees.

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